King Arthur

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For the Schoolmaster.

King Arthur.

The story of King Arthur is by many regarded as fabulous, but Hume says that "The poets, although they disfigure the most certain history by their fictions, and use strange liberties with truth where they are the sole historians, as among the Britons, generally have some foundation for their wildest exaggerations," and he thinks the story of Arthur not an exception to this rule.

Not having access to any history except Hume's, I have gathered most of the following incidents from the ancient ballads.

According to the bards, Arthur was descended from Brutus, and was born in "Brittaine" about the year 500. His father was King Uther, the chief leader of the Britons, and his mother was Agyana, or Igena, "a beautyous ladye," who was princess of Cornwall. When he was fifteen years old he was crowned.

It is said his father had, during the latter part of the fifth century, a powerful enchanter named Merlin, for a counsellor. This Merlin, who is said to have had a dragon for his father and a nun for his mother, advised the King to assemble all his distinguished knights (who would pledge themselves to wander round the world in search of the Sangraal, or cup out of which Jesus drank at the last supper) at feasts about a round table.

It was calculated to seat fifty knights, but only forty-nine seats were occupied until after the birth of Arthur, as the other seat was reserved for him; and as he was educated by Merlin and controlled in a great manner by his advice, he afterwards reëstablished the order of "Knights of the Round Table" at Winchester.

He married the celebrated Guenever, or Ginevra, who was a distant relative of his mother. He then reigned in peace for five years when he was applied to by the southern Britons for assistance against the Saxons, whom he discomfited in a great battle fought near Badon and in several other battles. He then conquered Scotland; and a high hill near Edinburgh is still called Arthur's Seat, said to have been so denominated from a tradition that King Arthur surveyed the country and defeated the Saxons in its neighborhood.

After this, the poets relate, he conquered Ireland, Denmarke, Norwaye, and Gallya, killed the "ugly giant Dynabus," who had his seat in Mt. St. Bernard, and was the terror of the regions, destroyed the giants of Spain, defeated the Roman Emperor and penetrated to Rome where he was crowned by the Cardinals.

After remaining in Rome for a year, he was called back by the treachery of his nephew, who stirred up his subjects to rebellion.

He defeated the rebels soon after his arrival; but they fled to another part of the country and raised a large army to oppose his troops. On the night before he expected to fight a battle, being forewarned in a dream that if he fought on the next day he should be killed, as soon as morning broke each of the leaders chose twelve trusty knights, whom they charged not to stir a weapon unless they should see a sword drawn on the opposite side, and rode forth to conclude a peace, or a truce.

"But when they were together mette,
And bothe to faire accordance broughte;
And a month's league betweene them sette,
Before the battayle sholde be foughte—

An addere crepte forthe of a bushe,
Stunge one o' th' King's knightes on the knee:
Alack! it was a woefulle chance
As ever was in Christentie."

For the knight drew his sword to kill the adder, and this being mistaken for a hostile movement, both parties drew their swords and fought till of the King's party there remained but two besides Arthur himself—his butler, Bedevere, and Lukyn, Duke of Gloster.

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" And when the King beheld his knightes,
All dead and scattered on the molde;
The teares fast trickled downe his face;
That manlye face in fight so bolde.

Nowe reste yee all, brave knightes, he said,
Soe true, and faithful to your trust;
And must yee then, ye valiant heartes,
Be lefte to moulder into dust!"

Just then he saw the traitor stalking round among the dead and in spite of the Duke's entreaty, " O staye my leige, O staye for love and charitie," he charged upon the rebel and thrust him through with his spear, but received a deadly blow himself. He then, turning to Sir Lukyn, said:

" O take my sword Excalibar,
And there into the river throwe:
For here, henceforth beneeth this tree,
All use of weapons I foregoe.

And fare thee well, thou trustye sword,
A better neer had valiant knighte,
With thee full ofte and manye a daye
Have I withstood my foe in fight.

With this good fauchion in my hande,
Oft have I reep'd the bloody feelde,
But nowe the fatalle houre is come,
That never more I may thee weelde."

The Duke then went to the river and threw in his own sword and kept back the King's, because it was so valuable — the blade being made of Cologne-steel, and the hilt set with precious stones. The King then asked him what he saw, and he replied that he saw nothing except the wind ruffling the water. The King then told him to go and throw in his sword, and not keep him lingering there in pain. The Duke then went to the river and threw in the scabbard, but hid Excalibar under a tree.

He then came back to the King, who again asked him what he saw, and he replied, nothing except the winds fighting with the angry waters. The King then told him he had deceived him twice, said that he should not know whom to trust if such a knight would be so false, and asked him if he would see his master dead just for a sword that pleased his eye.

" The Duke, all shent with this rebuke,
No aunswere made unto the Kinge:
But to the rivere tooke the sworde,
And threwe it far as he coulde flinge.

A hande and an arme did meete the sworde,
And flourishd three times in the air;
Then sunke benethe the renninge streeme,
And of the Duke was seene noe mair.

All sore astonied stood the Duke;
He stood as still, as still mote bee:
Then hastend backe to telle the Kinge;
But he was gone from benethe the tree.

Unto what place he colde not telle,
For never after he did him spye:
But hee sawe a barge goe from the lande,
And hee heard ladyes howle and crye.

And whether the Kinge were there or not,
Hee never knewe, nor ever colde;
For from that sad and direfulle daye,
Hee never more was seene on molde."

There was a farther tradition among the old Welsh bards, that King Arthur did not die, but was conveyed away by the fairies to some pleasant retreat, whence he would return again and reign in as great authority as ever.

S. A. W.

The man who did not think it was respectable to bring up his children to work has just heard from his three sons. One of them was a driver on a canal; another had been taken up as a vagrant; and the third had gone to a public institution to learn the shoe business, under a keeper.

Hotel philosophy is this, d'ye see,
I fee'd the waiters, so the waiters feed me.

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